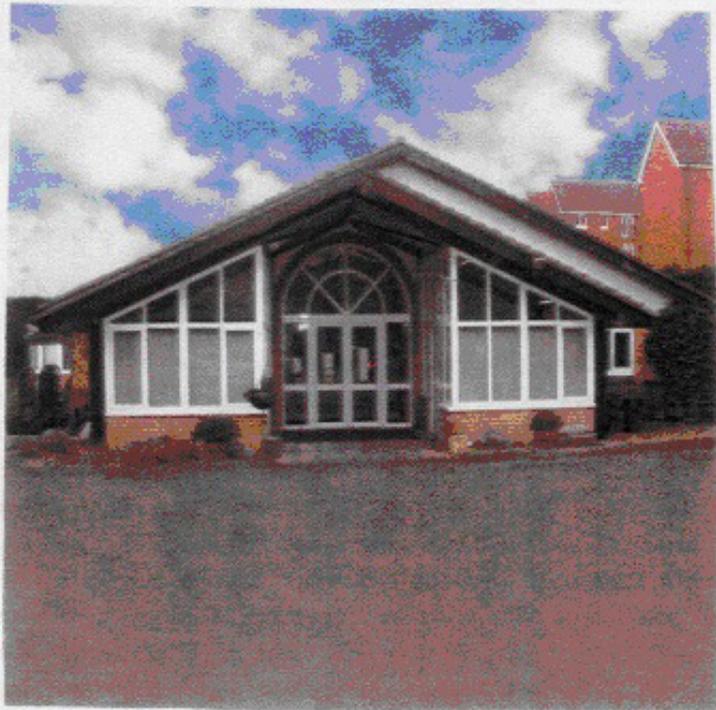


THE MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS SOCIETY

REDBRIDGE BRANCH



January 2013 Newsletter

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There was no alternative to cancelling the Caribbean evening. The snow defeated us and the Marjorie Collins Centre looked like a scene from Switzerland rather than Jamaica. The ambulances would not have functioned in the snow and many of you would not have been able to enjoy the evening. This is very disappointing as the Caribbean evening was to have been our first fund raising event of the year. Furthermore, Barclay's Bank would have doubled the money we would have raised. In the past, our themed evenings have been so successful and our volunteers did so much in the preparation of this event, planning the décor, the food and the tickets that we must not let their efforts go to waste and so the event has been put in Limbo, and we will hold the Caribbean evening later in the year.

Christmas at the centre was a great success. The Christmas dinner was well attended and enjoyed by all. Many of you said that the food was the best yet, and as usual the Disco was a great success and I would like to express our thanks for those who did decorations this year. The Christmas tree was a particular success.



The Christmas dinner gave us the opportunity to express our thanks to Joe our now retired centre manager. He had worked at the centre for over fifteen years. We presented him with an

engraved mantle clock as a lasting reminder, but knowing his love of cooking we also gave him a day's cookery course at Raymond Blanc's restaurant Le Manoir aux quatres Saisons where hopefully he will learn how to boil an egg! On a personal level, may I say that I am so pleased that Joe has agreed to





serve on our committee and that he will continue to come to see us and help with the finances, I suspect that after Raymond Blanc experience Joe will be too sophisticated to cook at the centre.

I hope you have all seen the wall clock presented to the centre by the ladies of "For Those in Need" in memory of Marjorie. This is a fine and lasting tribute to Marjorie our patron who did so much to improve the lives of those with Multiple Sclerosis

We have also been given a donation which will used to purchase an electronic bulletin board to provide on-going information of current and future events at the centre.

Over the last two months we have had great difficulties in maintaining our basic services, in particular our transport services. However thanks to the considerable efforts of Denis Rose our new transport officer we have been able to keep the centre going. The problems arose following the resignation of our previous drivers and transport officer and the delays in the appointment of our new centre manager. However most of these problems now seem to be overcome.

When I first met with the representatives of the Multiple Sclerosis head office, to discuss Joe's replacement, it seemed that there would be no problem in appointing the new centre manager. It was agreed that the advertisement would go out in the summer, interviews would follow and the appointment would be made in October to coincide with Joe's retirement. Nothing was further from the truth. The support given by head office was so disappointing. Failure to respond to our often daily emails, together with the frustrating failure of head office to make any practical decision, resulted in an unacceptable delay in the appointment such that at one stage we were seriously considering closing the centre. However the process was eventually completed and Thomas Murtagh has been appointed as our new centre manager. Even then, head office had not satisfactorily pursued the references such that there was doubt as to when Thomas could actually start working at the Centre. Unfortunately this episode

has soured our relationship with head office. As you know, your committee has for some time expressed concern regarding the lack of communication and support that we receive from head office. Following my discussions with their representatives last summer I had hoped that the situation would improve. Sadly this has not been the case. Your committee worries whether other branches of the society have similar experiences, and we feel we have no alternative but to raise our concerns at the next national AGM.

We are pleased to welcome Thomas as our new centre manager. There was a strong field of applicants for the post, but John Pettifer and myself, your representatives on the appointments committee had no doubt that Thomas was the best candidate for the post. Many of you will know Thomas already, as his father is a member of the Redbridge branch and Thomas has previously done a lot of voluntary work at the centre. Your committee has no doubt that Thomas will bring a fresh approach to the centre and we look forward to great improvements in the centre in 2013.

I hope you have all seen the new web site designed by John Harragan. It is a considerable improvement on the other site and much more user friendly. The web site will almost certainly become the most important means of communication. Thomas, our new centre manager has considerable computer skills and I suspect that our web site will become increasingly important and I encourage you all to familiarise yourselves with it.

Over the last year it has become increasingly apparent that our computers are inadequate and out-dated, frequently breaking down and with unreliable internet connections. To this end we have purchased four new computers and these are currently being installed with wi-fi now available throughout the centre.

As ever we are always looking for volunteers to help in the centre. Recently Janet, our secretary, John Pettifer and myself attended a open day at the Ilford town hall, where various charity organisations were advertising their services. I am optimistic that we have attracted several volunteers including students from Redbridge College who may require some vocational experience as part of their college courses. Recently we had an advertisement for volunteers in the Ilford Recorder, but this was unsuccessful and I would ask you to see if any of your families or friends would be willing to join us in running the centre. We can guarantee they will get a great of benefit from it.

The position regarding the MS Nurse specialist seems somewhat gloomy at the present time. In late November, I received a letter from Queens Hospital apologising for being late in responding to my letters to the chief executive dated last July! It pointed out that in view of financial cut backs in the NHS, it was likely that one of our nurse specialists would be sacrificed to save money. I understand an internal review is currently taking place. I pointed out that this branch initially raised the money to pump prime the post of MS nurse specialist and that this was done on the basis that Queens Hospital (then Oldchurch and King George Hospitals) would guarantee future funding of the post. I hope Queens Hospital is not about to renege on this commitment. The post of Multiple Sclerosis nurse specialist was designed for the care of patients, yet I understand that our nurse specialist may have been involved in research clinics at Queens. If so, the funding of a nurse should have come from whatever drug company was funding the trial and not from NHS funding of the nurse specialist, If this were the case, cutting our nurse specialist would be inappropriate and funding at Queens should have been more appropriately directed. I have discussed the situation with our MP Mr. Mike Gapes who is very supportive, and this year I shall again be campaigning for the nurse specialist's job description to be changed back so she can do a clinic at the Marjorie Collins Day Centre.

Your committee is currently reviewing our financial position. It is clear that our outgoing exceed our income year on year, with our physiotherapy and other therapies being responsible for most of our losses. Clearly we are unable to continue providing these services in their current form. For example physiotherapy is provided at a subsidised rate to our members, but these subsidies have also been available to members of other branches of the Multiple Sclerosis Society, and often patients are having more than one treatment session per week, and in some instances these subsidies have been made available to their relatives who do not have Multiple Sclerosis! This is not sustainable. We therefore have no alternative but to cut therapies to once a week, or if more than one session is given then the full cost will have to be met by patients or their relatives. We will also have to review the charging of members from other branches. We will also be reviewing the way in which treatments are delivered, for example group rather than individual treatments.

The cinema club continues. I understand that members have requested seeing older films for example "Blazing Saddles". Although this can be arranged

members should remember that many of these films are available on television. The cinema club was formed so that those unable to go to the cinema could see new film as soon as possible after their release on DVD. I am still disappointed that no one wanted to see the "The Guard" which I thought was one of the best films I had seen last year. Anyway we will continue to have monthly viewings and hope that this will develop further in 2013.

Returning to the cancelled Caribbean evening, it is essential that this go ahead later in the year. We need at least four major fund raising events per year to help balance our books. Our next Fund Raiser will be our "Auction of Promises" next month and later in the year we are planning a "Downton Abbey" "Upstairs Downstairs" evening. It is essential that as many of our members as possible and their families support these events.

Our new finance committee will be meeting again soon to examine ways in which we can use our centre as a means of fund raising.

So here we are at the start of a new year, with a new centre manager, new events and hopefully new volunteers and renewed enthusiasm for running the centre. Wheelchair limbo dancing may have been put on hold, but I am very optimistic that with your support, the services provided by the Marjorie Collins Day Centre (the flagship of the Multiple Sclerosis Society will continue to improve throughout 2013.

A Happy New Year

John Jestic

Chairman

Redbridge Branch